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ABSTRACT

A systematic approach for analysis of dyadic communication in literary works is proposed which is based on a work by Watzlawick, Beavin, and Jackson. This interdisciplinary methodology using behavioral science approaches to analyze literature consists primarily in studying relationship aspects of dyadic communication, as differentiated from content aspects. The specific methods involve first deducing the nature and function of the communication between characters who are members of a dyad (pair) and then deriving an interpretation of the story from a systematic approach applied consistently throughout the novel to the analysis of dyadic interaction. Four theoretically possible response modes to a dyadic partner's communication or presence in ongoing relationship, alternatives which must be chosen in response to the other partner are: (1) acceptance of communication by relating in full acceptance, by metacommunicating or going outside habitual responses and making the relationship itself the subject of communication, or by openly showing displeasure and by quarreling; (2) disqualification which is an invalidation of communication; (3) symptomatic behavior; and (4) attempted rejection of communication. A text processing analysis of Madame Bovary is discussed to exemplify the approach. (MKM)

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Method for Analysis of Dyadic Communication in Novels

Florence E. DeHart

THE METHOD AND ITS THEORETICAL BASE

Pragmatics of Human Communication; A Study of Interactional Patterns, Pathologies, and Paradoxes, by Paul Watzlawick, Janet Helmick Beavin, and Don D. Jackson (New York: Norton, 1967) offers the critic a systematic approach for analysis of dyadic communication in literary works that warrants serious attention. The interdisciplinary methodology consists primarily in studying relationship aspects of dyadic communication, as differentiated from content aspects. The specific objectives when utilizing the methodology are (1) to deduce the nature and function of the communication between characters who are members of a dyad (pair); and (2) to derive interpretation of the story from a systematic approach applied consistently throughout the novel to the analysis of dyadic interaction. Watzlawick, Beavin, and Jackson exemplify the methodology in Chapter 5, pp. 149-186, "A Communicational Approach to the Play Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" Unfortunately, this reference seems to have been overlooked or neglected by literary critics.

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Critical commentary often notes the functioning of communication in a novel but tends to ignore how it functions. Communication processes between characters warrant further explication, however, in a fashion amenable to more rigorous analysis. This contention is based on the following theoretical approach to literary criticism: A focus on the pragmatic effects of the "how," or mode, of stimulus-response interaction most accurately explicates the novel's story line. This focus is in preference to an emphasis on assumptions about the "why," or reasons behind behavior, as one might attempt to trace these reasons to the influence of such factors as inherited personal attributes, social milieu, the workings of the subconscious mind, or the impairment of free will. Evidence of the pragmatic effect of the behavior displayed by one member of a dyad toward the other constitutes identification of a behavioral mode. For example, suppose that the pragmatic effect of the behavior displayed by one member of a dyad to the other is that he lied to the other. Considerations relevant to the origin of his motivation, whether or not he was aware of enacting that particular mode of behavior, whether or not he acted with full volition, or whether the "other" considered him to be lying, do not govern the behavioral classification of the communication message. The text of a novel is the sole source of data gathered according to this method. Accounts of an author's life, his correspondence, and his draft scenarios with his own interpretations of what he intended

his characters to be are purposely excluded from consideration.

Characters define their relationships by the "command" aspects of messages communicated, those which tend through wording and tone to impose behavior and ultimately to define a relationship. "Command" aspects are distinct but not totally separate from "report" aspects, those which convey actual content. A fictional subgenre should be recognized to consist of those novels whose communication is dominated by "command" rather than by "report" aspects. The implication should not be drawn, however, that characters truly communicate, for they are not, of course, real people. Their communication consists merely of the author's written words transferred to the printed page. But critics are legitimately concerned with what the author has put down in his novel, including characters' communication. Systematic tracing and analysis of the "how" of communication, applied consistently throughout a novel, can surface the needed, but too often lacking, evidence for deriving and firming up interpretations.

Relationship aspects of communication are significant in novels that represent dyadic communication through straightforward, content-oriented dialogue among characters who have the capacity, the ability, and the will to communicate. But relationship aspects of communication are particularly important for interpreting those novels that lack the usual representation of communication through dialogue. Characters

in these novels exert efforts not to communicate and thereby ignore or flaunt the axiom that it is impossible not to communicate. They also impose behavior on each other in pathological relationship struggles which emphasize the "command" aspects of their communication. They do not avail themselves of metacommunication to help resolve their relationship problems. In these ways, their interactional patterns operate functionally to compound misunderstanding and impede open communication of true feelings. In a vicious circle, communication breakdown among the characters creates a pervasive network of misconceptions which in turn contributes toward further breakdown in communication.

Impaired communication connotes pathological interaction. This type of interaction tends, in effect if not in intent, to avoid the commitment inherent in communication by withholding and impeding the open expression of true feelings. Pathological communication, in its efforts to block or distort the open communication of true feelings, nevertheless has distinct message value. The successful, intentional blocking of forthright communication is not to be confused with "healthy" communication, however. "Effective" communication of this type is nonetheless pathological by the very fact that it aims to block "healthy" communication. The Watzlawick, Beavin, and Jackson volume provides extensive treatment of pathological communication and how to recognize it.

Critics who only examine whether meaningless dialogue serves to portray the conversational style of a particular

social class, or otherwise stop with surface considerations, miss its significant function of developing the story line as vehicles of the characters' efforts not to communicate. The novelist may deliberately use dialogue for the paradoxical purpose of working against communication to produce story lines dominated by interpersonal relations. Analysis must be utilized that is capable of identifying and shedding deeper insight into patterns of sidetracking and avoiding communication. An important question is how the novelist depicts communication when he creates conditions for interpersonal communication by establishing dyadic relationships but represents interactional exchange through a limited quantity of dialogue, the "report" aspects of which revolve for the most part around "nothing." This is a necessary feature of the "livre sur rien" to which the nineteenth century French author, Gustave Flaubert, aspired.[1]

For this reason, the recommended methodology, enlarged on below, will be illustrated by brief references to the novel, Madame Bovary (Bibliothèque de la Pléiade edition, Vol. I, of Flaubert's OEuvres, Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1951). Critics have noted that this novel is strongly lacking in the type of dialogue that has content significance and serves the usual function of moving along action through meaningful interpersonal exchange between characters. Instead, communication breakdown functions to create a pervasive network of misconceptions which in turn adversely affect the interpersonal relationships in the novel.

The characters' communication patterns determine the story line.

THE INTERDISCIPLINARY NATURE OF THE METHOD

Behavioral Science

The critic's analysis of relationship aspects of dyadic communication can be enhanced by knowledge from the field of behavioral science concerning human communication. This knowledge can be applied in appropriate ways to the analysis of character interaction to yield more concise, precise, and consistent explanations of communication behavior than those found in less rigorously-based commentary. Furthering one's knowledge in another discipline for application to one's down discipline poses the problem of the fairly extensive amount of time required for study, along with psychological resistance to accepting the fact that contributions from another field, in spite of its specialized terminology, can be beneficial.

The following is an attempt to clarify certain major concepts from behavioral science that are fundamental to analysis of dyadic communication in a novel. Principally, there is a total range of four theoretically possible response modes to a dyadic partner's communication, or presence in an ongoing relationship. This range of modes bears directly on the outcome of a novel. Each partner must at any point choose one of these alternatives in response to the other partner or face the logical necessity of taking his own

life: (1) acceptance of communication, i.e., communicating in three possible ways: (a) by relating in full acceptance to one's partner as he is; (b) by metacommunicating, defined here as a positive means of resolving relationship problems by stepping outside the circle of habitual stimulus-response interaction and making the relationship itself the subject of communication; or (c) by openly showing displeasure and by quarreling; (2) disqualification (defined below); (3) symptomatic behavior (defined below); and (4) attempted rejection of communication, as manifested by turning away or removing one's physical presence.

DEFINITION OF BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE TERMS

Three pathological communication patterns are defined below. The definitions provide an overall view of the kinds of responses which characterize pathological communication.

Disqualification

Disqualification is a mode of response to another's communication or to his presence in a sustained relationship. This mode, enacted when it is recognized that a response is expected and unavoidable, invalidates communication and ultimately a relationship through the following devices: the evasive sidestepping of ideas; self-contradiction; inconsistencies; double meanings; or vague, obscure wording. Prevarication may also be included as it avoids, like the other manifestations, the commitment inherent in

straightforward communication. In Madame Bovary, for example, disqualification was enacted by Emma toward Charles and reciprocally by both members of the Emma-Léon and Emma-Rodolphe dyads.

Symptomatic Behavior

Symptomatic behavior is also a mode of response to another's communication, or to his presence in a sustained relationship. It attempts to convey that the person in question would respond but that he is unavoidably prevented from doing so because of physical or nervous ailment, whether real, feigned, or imagined. This meaning is a narrow one to show that it precludes broader meaning, for example, that staggering is behavior symptomatic of drunkenness. In Madame Bovary, symptomatic behavior was enacted by Emma toward Charles. It is interesting to note that Emma substituted symptomatic behavior for the disqualification mode under certain circumstances. This method lends itself well to unearthing significant insights of this nature.

Disconfirmation

Disconfirmation is a mode of response to another's self-definition or view of himself as expressed through his words, actions, feelings, intentions, and meanings he gives to situations. This response negates the validity of the other's self-definition. It is only indirectly a response to another's communication. Disconfirmation operates through imperviousness by which one invalidates

another's messages by discounting, disregarding, or misinterpreting them, or by being insensibly unaware of them or of their significance. The enacting of disconfirmation over a period of time results in a generalized negation of the reality of another as the source of his own self-definition. In effect, the other is regarded, fully or on some points, as though he were nonexistent. As a result, one partner refuses, or fails to assess the other accurately, or to face up to an accurate assessment. It precludes salutary redefinition of relationships. This mode should not be confused with rejection of another's self-definition. The latter is a reaction that the other is wrong and presupposes recognition (meaning "attention to" not "approval") of what is being rejected. In Madame Bovary, disconfirmation was enacted reciprocally by both members of all three dyads.

Self-definition

The self-definition of characters must be established, for it is not possible to know whether a character's dyadic partners are engaging in disconfirmation of his self-definition unless it is established what he held it to be. A character's self-definition is determined in accordance with this method by examining his internal communication patterns as he deals with himself, and, where applicable, with God. Regarding Madame Bovary, according to certain critics' interpretation of Emma's self-definition, her pursuit of lovers was something other than a quest for physical gratification. This

method forces precision of her self-definition to reveal that her brief spell of pure love for God during her illness represented not a divine love between two human loves, as some critics describe it, but rather a purer expression of the spiritual aspiration she sought all along in the symbols of divine love as she mistook them: Léon and Rodolphe. She stepped from the lowest rungs of the ladder of spiritual ascent to a higher rung and back again to a lower rung. Emma's loyalty to her self-definition as one whose life pivoted on spiritually-based aspiration, however mistaken, governed her fatal reaction to Charles' disconfirmation of her. She resisted suffering the dark night of potentially purifying abysses of spiritual aridity that periodically rose up before her to free her from the inordinate attachments to persons, objects, places, and circumstances to which she clung.[2]

TEXT PROCESSING APPLICATION FROM INFORMATION SCIENCE

Text processing, or the handling of various types of data that can be derived from text, is an aspect of information science. It is essential not to confuse the data gathered with the literary interpretations that the critic derives from the data. The raw data in themselves do not constitute a finished product of literary criticism. Nor can data compensate for critical objectives that are not sound, or worse yet perhaps, unstated. The procedure to be followed in pursuing this method is to establish a data base of

entries by hand coding from the novel in question. Retrieval of the data may be either computerized or manual, the latter by means of sorts on punched cards. The entries exemplify the verbal and nonverbal dyadic communication between characters. Each column on the punched cards is designated as a particular mode of "healthy" or pathological communication. Any other desired data may also be coded, such as the names of characters in hearing of the dyadic exchanges. The data base may prove useful at a later date for purposes other than the original study.

In the case of the study exemplified here, 1,950-odd entries were established from Madame Bovary.[3] The coding procedure is systematic and therefore does not require as much time as would a system in which hand marking of a text is done without specific critical objectives. But it is the procedure for retrieval of data for analysis that proves the case for manual coding. This provides far simpler, more accurate organization even in a retrieval system utilizing sorts on punched cards than does the nearly impossible procedure involved in organizing hand markings throughout a text. It is no small wonder that many critical studies are produced with interpretations which find contradiction in other sections of the text. These errors can be avoided if critics would incorporate more systematic approaches to coding applied consistently throughout the novel within the framework of sound theoretical objectives.

THEORY OF LITERARY CRITICISM

The theoretician of literary criticism is interested in evaluating the validity of critics' interpretations. He examines the underlying theoretical constructs of various pieces of criticism. These constructs determine the types of evidence that were collected by the critic from the text and which he assembles into meaningful patterns useful for rigorous analysis. The critic then derives his interpretations from analysis of the data. Unfortunately, a number of pieces of literary criticism fail to indicate exactly on what theoretical premises the study rests or according to what guidelines the critic systematically gathered evidence to test the hypothesis in question. The method recommended in this paper is based on the stated theoretical construct enlarged on above that a focus on the pragmatic effects of the "how," or mode, of stimulus-response interaction most accurately explicates the story line.

Conflicting interpretations among critics can only be explained or reconciled when critical commentaries are based on given supportive evidence derived according to a specified rationale. And soundness of the underlying theoretical construct can only be judged when it is clearly explicated. For example, literary criticism of Madame Bovary is by no means characterized by unanimity of view. Conflicting interpretations of the following aspects are abundantly scattered in the critical literature with various pieces

treating one or more of the aspects: whether Charles actually gave Emma the undying love she sought; whether Léon considered Emma to be like Charles; whether Emma simply wanted to be free from wifehood; whether Emma had anything to choose between in life or instead refused to choose; whether Emma committed suicide from materialism;[4] whether Emma realized for the first time when on her deathbed the full extent of Charles' love for her; whether her laugh on hearing the voice of the blind man derived from its symbolizing hell, the absurd and nothingness, or some other meaning; whether Emma at the time of her death had any hope of salvation; and whether Emma or Charles is the dominant character in the novel.

However, an analysis of Madame Bovary such as the study referred to here, or of any other novel, according to systematic application of the method proposed in this paper, provides interpretation of all the various parts of the story line. These are derived from a consistent theoretical approach that treats the novel as a unified whole rather than in piecemeal fashion. Critical pieces of this nature make a definite contribution to the body of literary criticism on a novel whether or not the piece comes up with any new interpretations on any specific part of that novel. The contribution of this type of critical piece lies in its ability to provide a new total interpretation of the novel based on a specified underlying theoretical construct, with interpretations based on analysis of evidence systematically

and consistently identified throughout the novel in question. The theoretician of literary criticism can utilize such studies in determining the validity of interpretations and the soundness of various theoretical constructs. Piecemeal commentaries on parts of the story line without a given theoretical framework with supportive data provided accordingly are useless toward what should be a primary concern of literary critics: the building of a sound body of literary criticism.

The method yields the following selected insights on Madame Bovary that exemplify the need for a critical procedure to be applied consistently and successively throughout a novel: Emma's deception of her husband amounted ironically to a kind of suicidal self-destruction on Emma's part which gained momentum throughout the relationship. The reason is that his resultant concept of her as Madame Bovary negated her self-definition. Her response pattern has significance for interpreting her words to Charles near the end of the novel: "Oui . . . c'est vrai . . . tu es bon, toi!" (III, 582). Commentary on these words that fails to take into account Emma's response pattern to Charles throughout the novel falls short of fullness in accuracy of interpretation. Her behavior did not signify that she fully recognized Charles' devotion to her for the first time. Rather, Emma felt free to take the major step of feigning appreciation of his type of goodness with this degree of expressiveness only because of an exemption from

the consequence, granted her by the special circumstance of approaching death. She was now exempt from figuratively committing suicide by permitting further destruction of her self-definition as she had done throughout her married life each time that she had reinforced Charles' misconception of her.

Application of the background material from the behavioral sciences provided above will now be incorporated into the method by example. Charles' response of disconfirmation to Emma's self-definition acted on her loyalty to it to effect the dire actior of her suicide. Emma knew with certainty that Charles, in his disconfirmation of her true self, would magnanimously forgive her for her affairs and debts. His response would crown with apparent moral superiority on his part what might be described as his ultimate disconfirmation of her self-definition as one aspiring, notwithstanding her behavior, toward a spiritually-based ideal. On contemplating this inevitable response inherent in his pardon, Emma saw that she would find insupportable the redefinition of her relationship with him that would be necessitated in order to continue it. She resolved, in effect, to refuse to be responsible for exposing her self-definition to his ultimate disconfirmation. Emma then paradoxically confirmed her self-definition by taking her own life in a dramatic effort to preserve that self-definition against Charles' ultimate disconfirmation of it. The brush-off in the disqualification mode

that Emma received from Léon and Rodolphe served in the story line to actualize the threat to the ongoing Emma-Charles relationship.

Emma had no hope of Charles' ever changing, having long since discounted his ability in her disconfirmation of him to grasp anything that she might try to convey concerning her feelings and behavior. She could not run away or compromise her self-definition to the money lender. Nor could she feasibly bear to enact toward Charles in new ways her habitual response modes of disqualification and symptomatic behavior. Now faced with the actualization of the crisis, Emma remained steadfast in her resolution against responding to him through one of the remaining three choices out of the four defined above that were open to her. Thus, she imposed upon herself the paradoxical injunction of having to choose one of four theoretically possible alternatives, one of which, circumstances preventer her from applying in practice, and three of which, although possible in practice, she herself had vitiated. Consequently, she was obliged to comply with her self-imposed paradoxical injunction by succumbing, in the absence of choice, to the logical necessity of taking her own life. Emma realized the futility of her action, however. In response to the voice of the blind man, her cry of "L'Aveugle!" (III, 589) recognized that the required purification of her impure love of God in purgation after death awaited her through her imminent blind leap into the abyss of this dark

night that she could not now avert by throwing coins to the blind man.

This method for analysis of dyadic communication in novels, explained and illustrated above, may be useful as a pedagogical device. Not only should it preclude ill-defined thinking on the part of literary critics, but also on the part of students in their commentary on fictional works and story lines as explicated by characters' communication.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Jean Rousset, Forme et signification (Paris: José Corti, 1962), p. 111.

[2]The following works on mystical spirituality by Thomas Merton were utilized as aids in describing Emma's self-definition, deduced from the data base, as someone with spiritual aspirations, albeit on the lower rungs of the ladder of spiritual ascent: New Seeds of Contemplation (Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1961); and No Man Is an Island (New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World, 1955).

[3]I constructed the data base in 1971 while Associate Professor at the School of Library and Information Science, University of Western Ontario, Canada.

[4]One source gives three explanations for her suicide (Bart, Benjamin F., Flaubert, Syracuse, N. Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1967): (1) "She would thus never know true exaltation, the joy of Anna Maria's complete love, and she would pay with her death for this sin" (p. 270); (2) "Her materialism, not her sensuality, causes her death, although she does not so understand it" (p. 319); and (3) "In the face of this despairing calculation, she forgets the cause of her visit to Rodolphe; financial matters disappear from her ken, and she commits suicide because of a world in which it is no longer possible to

love" (p. 320). The method recommended in this paper explains her suicide, instead, in terms of how the momentum of her lifelong communication patterns functioned to bring it about.